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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 002334

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [PGOV](#) [IS](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: EAST BANK-WEST BANK DIVIDE GROWS AS INTIFADA
INTENSIFIES

REF: A. AMMAN 1805 B. AMMAN 2070

Classified By: CDA GREGORY L. BERRY FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Over the past few weeks the Israeli offensive in the West Bank has highlighted a trend we have seen growing as the Intifada has intensified--the cleavage between Palestinian Jordanians (West Bankers) and Transjordanians (East Bankers). Residual mistrust left over from the 1970 PLO attempt to overthrow the Hashemites has resurfaced, and there is growing fear that Israel could try to force Palestinians from the West Bank into Jordan. While most East Bankers openly support the Palestinian cause, many have privately expressed resentment that Palestinian Jordanians are once again a destabilizing force in the country. End Summary.

EAST BANKERS: LINGERING DISTRUST

2. (C) The protests in recent weeks against the Israeli incursions have sharpened the division between East and West Bankers. This division is particularly acute in Amman, where Badia police from traditional East Bank areas were brought in to deter pro-Palestinian protests. While many Palestinian contacts have blanched at the government's use of the Badia police, many East Bank contacts have conveyed their resentment that Palestinians are once again posing a challenge to the authority of the government.

3. (C) While few Palestinians refer back to the 1970 Palestinian attempt to usurp King Hussein, also known as Black September, East Bankers more frequently bring up the topic to explain their lingering distrust of Palestinian Jordanian intentions here. While most East Bank contacts acknowledge that the circumstances that allowed the Palestinians to challenge King Hussein in 1970 no longer exist, distrust and resentment remain.

4. (C) Several East Bank contacts told Poloff that tensions between Palestinian Jordanians and East Bankers increased substantially during the demonstrations over the past few weeks. While many were sympathetic to the protesters' cause, East Bankers were unsure how far the mostly Palestinian demonstrators would push the government. One East Bank government official was enraged after hearing reports (unconfirmed) that refugee camp residents were burning pictures of King Abdullah and Queen Rania. Another East Bank Foreign Ministry contact pointed to the experience of the Palestinians in Kuwait, "the Kuwaitis took them in and gave them good jobs, they live there for 30 years, then Saddam invades and the Palestinians turn on their hosts." This tension has also crept into the business sector. The Chairman of the Irbid Chamber of Industry spoke with frustration recently about attempts by the Amman Chamber of Industry to politicize the work of the Chambers in Amman, Irbid, and Zarqa. In contrast to the pro-business (and East Banker-controlled) Chambers in Irbid and Zarqa,

which count a number of QIZ producers among their membership, he noted the Amman Chamber is dominated by Palestinian Jordanians, has close ties to Islamist professional associations, and has been pushing hard to get the Chambers to call for a boycott of U.S. goods and of businesses that deal with Israel.

15. (C) Another underlying East Bank fear is that continued Israeli incursions in the West Bank will push large numbers of Palestinians into Jordan. It is widely believed here that Jordan can not absorb another wave of Palestinians. East Bank reluctance to sever ties with Israel in part stems from their mutual peace treaty, which they see as a guarantee that Israel will not conduct large-scale expulsions of Palestinians to Jordan. (see Ref B) King Abdullah and Prime Minister Abul Ragheb have both issued public statements in the last month confirming that Jordan would close its bridges if faced with a large-scale refugee flow. Indeed, during Israeli incursions, Jordan on occasion has closed the land border or has limited the hours for crossing to stem the traffic flow from the West Bank.

16. (C) While some East Bank contacts see the demonstrations creating instability, some East Bank contacts also place some blame on the government for its heavy-handed use of the police in the last few weeks. Nasir al-Lawzi, a well-connected East Banker, told Poloff that he was particularly concerned when the opposition was scheduling a large protest in spite of a government ban. (see Ref A) "The situation was very explosive, particularly if the police overreacted--what would happen if the police killed a protester?"

WEST BANKERS: FEELING INSECURE

17. (C) In return, many Palestinians here have complained about heavy-handed government tactics and say these tactics betray the government's anti-Palestinian bias. Poloff recently has heard some anecdotal stories about police harassment of Palestinian Jordanians. Most stories revolve around name-calling and occasional unprovoked beatings. Former Royal Court advisor Adnan Abu Odeh said that Jordan is the only country that mentioned "national unity" when calling for calm. Abu Odeh questioned why demonstrations against the Israeli offensive would threaten national unity, "it implies that Palestinians are anti-Israeli and Transjordanians are pro-Israeli." Abu Odeh believes (we think mistakenly) that the GOJ inserted undercover security officers into the demonstrations to provoke the crowd, thereby justifying its harsh response.

18. (C) Throughout the recent round of demonstrations, lasting roughly five weeks, we have heard several anecdotal stories of Palestinians in the Rabia area worried about the presence of the Badia police, one family even leaving their home for the weekends when the Badia were brought in to patrol. These Palestinians feared that Badia police would not recognize the difference between Palestinian protesters and Palestinian residents. Though still very angry at the ongoing situation, Palestinians appear reluctant to protest too loudly since the government established the "red-line" for demonstrations that were planned on April 12 (see ref).

19. (C) Abu Odeh attributes some of the Palestinian reluctance to test the government's "red-line" to the Palestinian feeling that they

are merely residents of Jordan, not citizens. As such, they believe their position in Jordan, economically and socially, is at the mercy of the government and security services. Abu Odeh said he was not surprised that the opposition backed down and canceled demonstrations on April 12 when the government stepped up security. He said the Muslim Brotherhood rank and file is made up of Palestinians, but the leadership is made up of Transjordanians. The Transjordanian leadership, according to Abu Odeh, want to maintain some friendliness with the government, otherwise it would risk their future ability to secure high-ranking ministerial positions.

10. (C) While some see the division between East Bank and West Bank clearly, a few contacts stress that Jordanians are united. One East Bank contact said that relations between East Bankers and West Bankers are getting so intertwined that it is difficult to completely separate the two. "When a Palestinian in the West Bank is killed, condolences are received in the East Bank." Abdul Karim Abul Haija, Director General of Jordan's Department of Palestinian Affairs, told Refcoord that the situation was so bad during the demonstrations because "our own people are firing on us." However, it seems clear that Transjordanians with a stronger sense of their East Bank identity do not see that as the case.

COMMENT

11. (C) The East Bank-West Bank division is a complex nationality issue in Jordan. Many Palestinian Jordanians emphasize that they consider themselves solely "Jordanians" since they were born in the West Bank when it was under Jordanian control. However, East Bankers still tend to question the loyalty of Palestinian Jordanians and to which state they are most loyal to--Jordan or the future Palestine. Almost all Jordanians--East Bank and West Bank--support the Palestinian cause, but the rise in Palestinian activism during the last several weeks--and the fact that it is mostly East Bankers who have responsibility for maintaining order--has exacerbated this division in Jordanian society.

BERRY